



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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October 1, 2007

## **OREGON BULLETIN NO. OR-250-2008-1**

### **SUBJECT: Attendance at Training, Meetings and Purchase of Food at Meetings or Award Ceremonies**

**Purpose.** This bulletin sets out policy for NRCS Oregon employee's attendance at training ~~courses~~ and meetings sponsored by federal agencies, state and local government organizations and non-governmental organizations. For the purpose of this bulletin, the term "meetings" includes events such as conferences, congress, conventions, seminars, symposiums and workshops. The term "training courses" refers to training courses sponsored or put on by any organization other than the NRCS National Employee Development Center (NEDC). Employees who have been approved to attend NEDC courses through the AgLearn approval process do not have to fill out the One Time Meeting or Training Course form as the travel to attend NEDC courses has already been approved along with course attendance. This bulletin also sets out policy on the purchase of food or refreshments at meetings, ceremonies etc. where government employees or the public is in attendance.

**Expiration Date.** When rescinded.

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Attendance at training courses or meetings: Congress has passed a number of laws that govern federal employee attendance at training courses and meetings. Under current laws, NRCS employees may attend non-government organization sponsored meetings or training courses at government expense if two conditions exist:

- if the meeting or training course is part of an authorized training program or part of their prescribed duties included in their position description
- if it is related to agency functions or agency management

Employees may attend meetings or training courses sponsored by federal or State and Local government agencies if the following conditions exist:

- the expenditure of travel and training funds must make a direct contribution to the NRCS Oregon fund to be charged.
- the expenditure of the funds must not be prohibited by law.

Employees may attend meetings of professional organizations, both employee sponsored and non-employee sponsored, if giving/receiving training (including making presentations) or related activities or, in some cases, as a USDA liaison to the organization. The attendance will be on the

clock if it is determined that there is benefit to the agency from their participating, and will be on government time and expense. Employee attendance at employee or professional organization meetings will not be automatically approved on the One-Time Meeting/Training Attendance Approval Form even if the meeting is on the employee IDP. Benefit to the agency from the employee's attendance must be included on the form.

The most common meetings, sponsored by both government and non-government organizations, attended by NRCS employees on an annual basis for training or agency representation purposes are listed in Attachment A. Annually, supervisors will ensure that any of the meetings listed in Attachment A that their employees need to attend are added to their Individual Development Plan (IDP) during the employee's annual performance review.

Supervisors should request approval for their employee's attendance at meetings or training sessions that are not listed in Attachment A or are not part of an employee's routine duties or on their IDP using the One-Time Meeting/Training Attendance Approval Form available at <http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/FNM/index.html> then select Meetings-Training-Travel One-Time Approval Template. The form must be signed by the supervisor and e-mailed or faxed to the State Administrative Officer for funds approval and forwarding to the State Conservationist for approval. The signature of the supervisor certifies that the expense is necessary and the meeting has been added to the Individual Development Plan. Requests to hold meetings within Oregon where the total cost will be \$7500 or less may be approved by the State Conservationist. Requests with a total cost exceeding \$7500 must be sent to the Regional Assistant Chief for approval by the Deputy Chief for Management. All meeting requests to put on meetings within Oregon must be submitted with all the tabs (the One-Time Meeting/Training form and the Site Analysis (8 or more)>\$7.5K form) on the One-Time Meeting/Training Attendance Approval Form completed and sent to the State Administrative Officer for a recommendation of concurrence/non-concurrence to the State Conservationist.

**Purchase of Food or Refreshments at Meetings and Ceremonies:** As a general rule, appropriated funds may not be used to provide meals, snacks, and refreshments to government employees, unless they are in travel status, or meet the following exceptions:

- a. NRCS may pay for food at NRCS-sponsored meetings if the purpose of the meeting is for training concerning aspects of the agency's mission, and the majority of the attendees are in training status. These meetings must be on an intermittent basis and cannot be used for day-to-day routine business meetings. Meeting approval, including the food and lodging expenses, must be requested with the One-Time Meeting/Training Attendance Approval Form.
- b. For meetings sponsored by a non-government organization, the employee will commonly be charged a fee, usually a registration fee. If a single fee is charged covering both attendance and meals and no separate charge is made for meals, NRCS is allowed to pay the full fee. If a separate charge is made for meals, the government may pay for the meals if it can be documented that the meals are incidental to the meeting, that the attendance of the employee at the meals is necessary to full participation in the business of the conference and that the employee is not free to take the meals elsewhere without

being absent from essential formal discussions, lectures, speeches, etc. All three conditions must be met for NRCS to pay.

c. When NRCS is authorized to pay for meals in the circumstances in paragraphs a. and b. above, the employee normally cannot be reimbursed for purchasing alternate meals. Employees are responsible for arranging for acceptable substitute meals if their personal taste does not accommodate eating meals paid for by the government. Personal taste is not considered a factor in a decision to reimburse for meals, however, bona fide medical or religious reasons for not eating the meals can be considered by the approving official. For an employee on travel or temporary duty status where the government is paying for meals, their MI&E will be reduced by the values of the meals provided.

d. The rules above do not apply to day-to-day routine agency-sponsored meetings, because employees can not be furnished free food at their official duty station. GSA has described "day-to-day" business meetings as meetings that involve discussions of the internal procedures or operations of the agency.

Food at award ceremonies: NRCS appropriations may be used to provide refreshments at award ceremonies under the Government Employees' Incentive Awards Act of 1997. NRCS is authorized to use its operating appropriations to cover "the necessary expense for the honorary recognition of" the employee or employees receiving the awards.

If further clarification of these rules is necessary, please contact the Financial Management staff or the State Administrative Officer prior to making any arrangements for food at meetings to avoid improper purchases or expenses..

/signed/

BOB GRAHAM  
State Conservationist

Enclosure

cc via website:

<http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/bulletins/bulletins07-08.html>

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**NRCS Oregon List of Pre-Approved Annual Meetings**

1. OACD Convention
2. National Civil Rights Committee Meetings
3. Meeting of the Society for Range Management (SRM)
4. National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting
5. Soil and Water Conservation Society Meeting
6. National Leadership Team Meetings
7. NRCS Oregon Leadership Team Meetings
8. Quarterly NRCS Oregon Basin Team Leader Meetings
9. Basin Employee Meetings (1 per quarter, 8 hours or less, minimal travel and meeting room expenses)
10. MO Leaders Meetings (twice per year)
11. National Soil Survey Work Planning Conference
12. West Region Soil Survey Work Planning Conference
13. Washington Soil Survey Work Planning Conference
14. Idaho Soil Survey Work Planning Conference
15. Oregon Soil Survey Work Planning Conference
16. M0-1 Technical Team Meeting
17. Conservation Boot Camp Instructional and Participant Travel
18. West State Conservationists Meetings
19. Annual Association of State Dam Safety Officials Conference
20. Pacific Rim Regional Association of RC&D Councils Annual Meeting
21. Annual ESRI International User Conference
22. Conservation Planning Course
23. Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, Inter-Tribal Agriculture Council and Alaska Village Initiatives National Conference
24. Quarterly Civil Rights Committee Meetings
25. Annual Train-the-Trainer Civil Rights Training
26. National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees
27. Asian Pacific Islander Organization Training Conference (APIO)
28. American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANE) Training Conference
29. National Organization of Professional Hispanic Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees (NOPHNRCSE) Annual Conference
30. American Society of Agronomy (ASA)
31. Soil Science Society of America (SSSA)
32. Crop Science Society of America (CSSA)
33. Annual International Meeting of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers